

EXAMPLES OF TYPES OF QUESTION PROBES

Question probes must be neutral. The reason for using question probes is to motivate the respondent to give a more complete answer without introducing bias. Under the pressure of an interview situation, an interviewer may unintentionally imply that an answer may be more acceptable than another answer, or might hint what information should be included in the response.

EXAMPLES OF UNCLEAR RESPONSES

Question: Do you smoke cigarettes now?

Answer: I tried to quit about a year ago.

Question: How often do you (activity)?"

Answer: Not very often.

PROBE TO CLARIFY

"What do you mean exactly?"

"Could you explain that a little?"

PROBE FOR SPECIFICITY

"Could you be more specific?"

What, who, how, why...?"

PROBE FOR RELEVANCE

"Would you tell me how you mean that?"

"Let me ask you again."

PROBES FOR COMPLETENESS

"Is there anything else?"

"Can you think of anything else?"

EXAMPLES OF CONVERSION TECHNIQUES TO COMPLETE INTERVIEWS INITIALLY REFUSED

Introductory sentence when contacting respondent to attempt to get an interview again:

I realize you have been contacted before by the (AGENCY). I would like to give you a little more information about the study because we want everyone to have an opportunity to participate. (Insert Info.)

I'm not interested.

I understand. I am not a political group. I am not selling anything. I am from (AGENCY). (Insert PURPOSE OF STUDY AND HOW DATA WILL USED). The interview will not take too long.

I'm still not interested.

I'm sorry to inconvenience you. Each household must be given the opportunity to participate. There is a very good chance that someone else in the household is the person that needs to be interviewed.

I don't have time/I'm busy/This isn't a good time.

I understand. Let me make an appointment at another time. Someone will call you later.

There is no convenient time to call or come back.

We will be interviewing for the next several days. What day is best for you?

I don't do surveys. Mail it to me.

Unfortunately, we can only conduct this survey in person (or over the phone). The survey will only take a few minutes, and most people find the questions interesting. Let me start so you can see what they are like. If you do not want to answer a particular question, let me know, and we can proceed with the next one. (Immediately ask the question.)

I don't like to do surveys. Call someone else.

The survey will only take a few minutes, and it is very important that everyone we contact is included so the results will be scientifically accurate.

I told you the other day I am not interested.

I apologize. This study requires that everyone be called back.

CONVERTING REFUSED INTERVIEWS INTO COMPLETED INTERVIEWS

Initially refused interviews can often be converted into completed interviews. The following techniques can be used to help convert initially refused interviews:

- Use the information from the initial contact to formulate specific answers to the respondent's potential questions during the next contact.
- Be sure to express empathy at the beginning of the next contact with the respondent.
- Be certain that the interview status is not incorrectly recorded as a refusal. For example, *I do not have time to talk now*, may be interpreted mistakenly as a refused interview.

Interviewers should learn not to take a refusal personally. They also need to know that the highest completion rates occur at the initial contact. Therefore, interviewers should be persuasive to get the interview.

A refusal is an expression of the respondent's fear or resistance, not a negative judgement of interviewer competence. While it is not often the case, a small number of respondents can sometimes be hostile. With the exception of a verbally abusive respondent, eligible persons who refuse will be contacted again to make a second attempt at completing the interview. The second contact should be made by a different interviewer or supervisor specially trained in refusal conversion.

There will always be times when a respondent will refuse to complete the interview, no matter how well trained, courteous, and prepared the interviewer may be. The interviewer may have contacted the respondent at an inconvenient time, even though an appointment was scheduled. If the respondent asks for an interview at another time, another appointment should be scheduled.

The respondent may be concerned about the legitimacy or purpose of the survey. The interviewer will need to explain the purpose of the survey clearly and ensure respondent confidentiality. If the respondent is still not satisfied with the explanation, a means to contact a supervisor should be provided.

DATA COLLECTION AND FIELD OPERATIONS

RESOURCE

HOUSEHOLD DISPOSITION RECORD

Interviewer Initials	Date	Begin Time	End Time	Status	Comments	Appointment Date Time

Status Codes:

- 1H Completed
- 2H No household member at home
- 3H Entire household absent for extended period
- 4H Postponed/Rescheduled
- 5H Refused
- 6H Dwelling vacant
- 7H Address not a dwelling
- 8H Dwelling destroyed
- 9H Dwelling not found
- 10H Other

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DATA COLLECTION AND FIELD OPERATIONS RESOURCE

RESPONDENT INFORMATION SHEET

Household ID:

Address:

City/Town/Village:

Providence/Region/State:

Members of Household	M/F	Age
1 _____	_____	_____
2 _____	_____	_____
3 _____	_____	_____
4 _____	_____	_____
5 _____	_____	_____
6 _____	_____	_____
7 _____	_____	_____
8 _____	_____	_____
9 _____	_____	_____
10 _____	_____	_____

Sampling Instructions:

DATA COLLECTION AND FIELD OPERATIONS

RESOURCE

INDIVIDUAL CONTACT RECORD

Interviewer Initials	Date	Begin Time	End Time	Status	Comments	Appointment Date Time

Status Codes:

1 Not at home

2 First refusal/breakoff

3 Come back - no appointment

4 Come back - appointment

5 Initial language problem

6 Project specific code

7 Problem

C Complete

PC Partial complete

I Ineligible

RB Final refusal/breakoff

LP Final language problem

O Other

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DATA COLLECTION AND FIELD OPERATIONS

GOALS AND STANDARDS

Goals

- Over time, increase capacity to collect nationally representative data.
- Over time, increase capacity to collect more rapid health risk information for use in planning prevention and health promotion programs and policy.

Standards

- Maintain detailed and accurate appointment and interview records as a quality control measure.
- Ensure participants' response rates without replacing selected sample.
- As the sample expands toward national coverage, ensure that multiple participating sites ask common questions and collect data during similar time periods.

DATA COLLECTION AND FIELD OPERATIONS

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS



Examples of types of question probes can be found under Resources at the end of this section.

Record open-ended questions

Open-ended questions should be recorded verbatim. Everything a respondent says, in his or her own words, should be written down. When using open-ended questions, the interviewer should:

- Be ready to write.
- Use abbreviations (spell out the abbreviation during the editing process).
- Kindly ask the respondent to slow down, if unable to capture the exact response. People are usually flattered when you ask them to speak more slowly or repeat something, because you "don't want to miss anything," or you "want to get all of the information."

Beware of artificial biochemical and behavioural self-report data collection link

The tendency among medical researchers is to incorporate the newer behavioural self-report measures into biochemical data collection efforts, limiting the frequency with which self-report behavioural data can be collected, and thereby limiting the usefulness of the data collected. Blood sample and intrusive biochemical measures are more costly and require a link to a health clinic or hospital, lab equipment, nurses, etc. From a practical standpoint, biochemical data collection cannot be conducted at the same rate as is possible for self-report behavioural risk factors, in order to effectively link data collection to prevention data use.

DATA COLLECTION AND FIELD OPERATIONS

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

Use question probing Question probing is the technique used by interviewers to stimulate discussion and obtain more information. Question probes are used when respondents provide incomplete or meaningless answers. Question probes encourage respondents to express thoughts in more specific terms. Probes may be necessary because some respondents may:

- Misunderstand the point of the question
- Answer in a way that is not clear, using loose terms as one might during social conversation
- Be talkative and give a lengthy and/or detailed response that does not answer the question

Question probes have two major functions:

- Motivating respondents to clarify answers
- Helping respondents focus their answers so that irrelevant and unnecessary information can be eliminated

Question probes must be done without introducing bias or antagonizing respondents. Interviewers must not unintentionally imply that one answer is more acceptable than another answer, or hint at what information should be included in a response. Practice role-plays should be done using actual questions, set in problematic scenarios, to avoid interviewers feeling under pressure in real interviews.

Specific question probes relevant to particular questions can be highlighted in some form directly on the interviewer questionnaire protocol. Using a question probe during an interview can be indicated directly on the questionnaire interview protocol by marking an X in the margin beside the probed question. Marking the questionnaire interview protocol in this way provides the means to show that a conversation between the interviewer and the respondent took place. The respondent's answer, combined with the X indicating that a question probe was used, gives a complete picture of the conversation.

DATA COLLECTION AND FIELD OPERATIONS

ACTION STEPS

- Offering incentives (e.g., money, free health or lifestyle assessments, gifts, lottery, etc.) to increase participation

Decrease sources of error

Respondent accuracy depends on how well respondents understand the questions and recall the information needed to answer the questions.

Respondent accuracy may also depend on norms associated with the type of interview, perceptions of interviewers, or concerns about self-protection and self-presentation.

Measurement error and response inaccuracy may occur if respondents interpret questions in unexpected ways or if they cannot recall the information needed to answer a question.

Measurement errors decrease under surveillance procedures that encourage interviewers to conform to established data collection practices and procedures.

DATA COLLECTION AND FIELD OPERATIONS

ACTION STEPS

Establish and implement a quality assurance plan

Establish and implement a quality assurance plan. Ensuring quality and consistency of the data is important to the accuracy and credibility of results. Determining how many interviewers should be monitored depends on the experience of the interviewing staff. At least one full interview should be monitored for each interviewer.

Quality assurance steps include:

- Establish interviewer monitoring guidelines
- Schedule a supervisor or lead interviewer to monitor interviews during each monitoring period
- Use audio equipment to monitor face-to-face interviews
- Document interviews that are monitored
- Discuss monitored interviews with interviewer to improve skills
- Determine procedures for addressing interviewer errors and falsification

Maintain a high cooperation rate

Surveillance relies on voluntary respondent participation and some respondents do refuse to participate. Interviewers should be assured that refusals are not a reflection of their competency, but rather a reflection of the respondent's fear or resistance. Sensitive questions and hostile respondents can both be factors. Response rates can be improved by:

- Demonstrating the importance of the data collection
- Generating publicity for the survey
- Assuring and maintaining respondent confidentiality before, during, and after the interview
- Matching interviewer and respondent on characteristics such as gender, age, race, or ethnic background
- Teaching interviewers conversion techniques to complete interviews initially refused (Example refusal conversion techniques can be found under Resources at the end of this section.)
- Providing an official surveillance contact telephone number or address where respondents can ask questions and express any concerns they may have



DATA COLLECTION AND FIELD OPERATIONS

ACTION STEPS

can be reached around work schedules.

Interviews should be scheduled around religious and recreational holidays and other special or seasonal events, such as crop planting and harvesting. Local customs, work patterns and seasonal dietary habits such as fasting must be taken into account.

Community support may be enlisted to help schedule interviews. Follow-up contact with respondents will be needed to complete some interviews. It is imperative to ensure that each respondent meets the eligibility requirements for the survey.

Maintain appointment and interview records

An appointment should be scheduled if the selected respondent cannot immediately participate in an interview at the time of the initial contact. The contact record should include:

- Name of the selected respondent
- Person with whom the interviewer spoke
- Date, day of the week, and time of the contact
- If applicable, the reason for a followup interview
- Final status of the case



An example contact record, respondent information sheet, and household disposition record can be found under Resources at the end of this section.

Once an appointment is made, the interview case should remain in the appointment file until the interview is either completed or a maximum number of attempts to try to schedule an appointment, which has been clearly defined, has been exceeded. Supervisors should manage the appointment file to be sure that interviewers keep their appointments and follow-up on all interview cases appropriately.

Make rescheduling and interview disposition decisions

Establish a rescheduling process. Establish a code to track the number of visits or calls required to complete the case. Determine the number of attempts required for contacting a respondent before assigning a final disposition code of "interview not completed."

DATA COLLECTION AND FIELD OPERATIONS

ACTION STEPS

Determine the frequency with which data will be collected

Countries must balance their current infrastructure realities against the long-term goal to establish and maintain a sustainable behavioural risk factor surveillance system. To the extent possible, consider how to increase frequency of collection for data gathered less often than every two years.

Select the data collection period for one surveillance cycle

For a single survey cycle within the surveillance plan, determine the time period in which data will be collected, taking holidays and special/seasonal events into account.

In order to maintain a scientific and valid approach, sites should not extend the interviewing period beyond the specific time period. If a site wants to change its data collection time period, the agency providing surveillance oversight should be consulted.

Determine location(s) for surveillance administration

The location for conducting the survey will likely be one of the following:

- Household
- Community or neighborhood center
- Clinic or local health department
- School or university

Regardless of the location, it is extremely important to ensure privacy for the respondents so that they can answer truthfully about personal health issues without fear of being overheard by family members. For most countries, data collection will take place in households. Creative delivery and response techniques can be used to help overcome privacy obstacles, such as using tape recorders and headsets to deliver sensitive questions that respondents can complete on a self-report instrument.

The location selected should be easily accessible and safe. There should be an adequate power source for lighting, heating, and cooling to provide a comfortable environment for respondents and interviewers.

Schedule interviews

Interviews can be scheduled during weekdays, evenings, and on weekends. Scheduling should be done to ensure that respondents